DESTINY AND FATALISM

Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maudoodi

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It is an English version of Jabr-o-Qadr Urdu, a speech of Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, broadcast from Radio Station Lahore on 23rd Oct., 1942.

Is our destiny settled in advance? Are our rise and fall, our making and unmaking, our comforts and deadlocks and all that befalls us in this world is the end result of a decision, in the making of which we had no part? If this is so, are we utterly helpless? Is it so that a scheme has already been prepared and we are just used in that scheme as an instrument for its fulfilment? Are we something like actors on a stage whose part has already been assigned in advance?

These questions keep pricking the mind of any person who has ever thought about the world and the position of man in it. Philosophers, social scientists, historians, legislators and all those engaged in the discussion of social, ethical and religious problems have always focussed their

attention in trying to solve this riddle. Because it is here their vehicle of thought is stuck up and does not move forward unless you find a satisfactory solution, though the solution as such may be right or wrong.

If you wish to give a simple answer in 'yes' or 'no' to the questions posed above, you can. But this simple yes or no gives rise to various other questions which cannot be answered in terms of yes or no.

If you say "Yes" (That we are helpless) then you have to accept that there is no real difference between stone, iron, tree, animal and a human being. Like everything else, a human being is also doing the same thing that has been assigned to him in advance. Neither of the two can act independently on their own. There is no difference between the making of bee-hive by the bees and that of a railway line by the humans, because the bee-hive and the railway lines are made to be constructed by someone else. Both of them are deprived of the honour of invention. Thereafter, you will have to accept that like the other objects of the world, man is not responsi-

ble for his deeds. The performance of a good deed by a man and the proper running of a motor car are similar and equal acts. The commission of a crime by a man and production of bad stitches by a sewing machine are of the same order. When such is the position, then just as you don't say a "righteous car", a "mischievious machine", an "honest engine", a "rougish wheel", in the same way, you should never use the words good and bad, noble and ignoble, honest and dishonest and similar adjectives while referring humans. If at all you are using those words (as you are helplessly forced to utter these words by someone else) then at-least you should realise that these words are meaningless. The chain of logic does not end here. All our religions and ethics, our laws and administration of justice, our police and jails, our department of investigation of crimes, our educational institutions, our training and reform centres are all rendered meaningless. Although all these activities will be in operation in full swing, and none of them will cease, because according to your view, all actors have to perform their assigned role on the world stage. It is obvious that those performing Namaz in the mosque and worship in a temple,

judges of the court, criminals indulging in loot and plunder, will all be reduced to the status of actors.

If events ranging from prayer halls to gambling dens and jails tend to become different scenes of a mighty drama. It would imply that the entire moral and religious life of a man reduces itself to a play and a game. The one who is performing prayer in the solitude of night and the one breaking the locks for stealing are both performing that part which has been assigned to each. There is no difference between them except that the director has given to one the part of a pious man and to the other the part of a thief. However seriously a judge may be hearing a suit in the court of law, according to your view point, the judge, the defence and the prosecution are all mere actors performing their part in the drama; but are under a delusion that they are dispensing real justice. This is the logical conclusion that follows from your "yes" you had responded with to my preliminary queries.

Well then, is your answer "No" (that we are not helpless) for the questions I posed? But here

ılso the difficulty is that the matter will not :ome to an end by a simple 'no' and it will lead ⁄ou to deny various hard facts of life. When you ;ay that the destiny of a man is not pre-deter- nined and no external forces are involved in its naking, then you mean to say that man himself s the marker of his destiny and that his destiny s the product of his determination and strug- ;les. The first question that arises from your ;tatement is, what exactly do you mean by the vord "man"? Does it mean individually each nan or a group of men we call society and na- ion? or it implies the whole human race? If you nean to say that each man makes his own desti- ıy, then have a glance over the factors that make he destiny and then specify those factors over vhich man enjoys command. The first and fore- nost instrument helpful in making destiny are ıis own body organs, his mental and physical ›owers and the ethical virtues, whose enormity ›r deficiency, equilibrium or otherwise has a lecisive effect on his destiny. But it is from a nother's womb that a man inherits all these powers ınd to this day not a single person is born who ıas moulded himself according to his own choice ınd preferences. Further, the effects of the traits, ı man inherits from his ancestors, also make

their own contribution in the making or marring of destiny. Apart from this, the mental, ethical, cultural, economical and political effects of the society, the nation or the country in which he is born automatically influence him, the moment he steps into this world. All these influences take part in the making of destiny. Is there any person who has chosen his race, and the environments into which he is born and who has decided by himself as to which influences he is going to accept? In the same way the good and evil effects of the events of the world have a decisive effect on the destiny of man. Earthquakes, floods, famines, seasons, diseases, battles, economic rise and fall, accidental happenings often change the direction of the entire life of a man, and disrupt all his plans of prosperity and success which he had planned after a lot of deliberations. In contrast, very often these very accidents make him reach such heights of success, in the attainment of which least efforts on his part are involved. These are such obvious experiences, the denial of which requires a great deal of stubbornness. How then can we conclude that man is the maker of his own destiny?

If you make an amendment in your hypothesis and assert that it is not the individuals, but

the nations who make their own destiny; even this is not acceptable. The causes that contributes to the formation of a destiny comprise racial qualities, historical influences, geographical conditions, natural resources and international state of affairs; and it is not in the reach of any nation to make its own destiny free from the constrains of those conditions. The natural laws that govern the affairs of the heavens and earth have yet to be explored in its entirety let alone interfering into its operations. These laws have such overbearing effect on the destiny of nations, that it is not within its power to stop its operation or save itself from its onslaught. This law, that lies beyond our vision, keeps operating in a way that sometimes suddenly and at other times progressively, produces such results which make the rising nation fall and the falling nation rise. These are the causes which are beyond human control. But a detailed analysis of the causes which are within human reach is also not very encouraging. The destiny of a nation depends to a large extent upon the availability of a proper leadership and the existence of qualities necessary for taking advantage of such a leadership. We have no evidence in history nor do we come across any precedents in our observations which go to

prove that any nation has exercised its independent choice in availing these two resources. What we commonly observe is, whenever it is time for the rise of a nation, it gets a good leadership and it is endowed with qualities which makes this leadership a success. And whenever a nation is about to fall, the qualities of its leadership and its following are on retreat in such a way that its greatest patrons fail to resuscitate those qualities. We are totally unaware of the laws under which the historics of nations undergo these ups and downs.

Leaving the nations aside, are you going to pass the judgement that it is the humanity as whole which makes its own destiny. But to say so is still more difficult. If somebody supposes that the humanity which is divided among races and nations, spread among countries with diverse cultures and civilisations speaking different languages, has a collective will to think and determine its destiny, then it is a very strange supposition. Is it really so that this human race had set its own time table of development that till this era, it will use the instruments of stone and then it will start using iron and fire thereafter? Had it decided that it will make use of hu-

man power and animal power till a certain stage, that it will sail its boats without mariners compass up to a certain period and then it will start using compass in fixing the direction of its journeys. Is it the human race only that has chosen different destinations for its various parts comprising Africa. America, Europe, Asia and Australia? It is obvious, that no one endowed with any common sense will ever make such a strange and peculiar claim.

After this discussion there can be no provision to stick to your view that man makes his own destiny; because when no one individually is the master of one's own destiny, nor a group of individuals, nor the human race as a whole, then to whose share will the power of making the destiny go?

Now you have realised that the preliminary questions I posed in the beginning, cannot be answered with a positive yes or a decisive no. The reality lies somewhere in between these two positions. Nobody can free oneself from the mighty force which is governing the vast universe and act independently. Let alone act, cannot even

survive. It is a multifarious scheme which is forcefully operating on earth and in the universe. None has the wherewithal to go against this scheme or to change it or influence it in any way. All our knowledge, our experiences and our observations bear testimony to the fact that in this kingdom of the universe, there is certainly no provision for autonomy. We are living under such a system whose tight control of the universe never allows the huge planets of the sky to change the appointed path even by a hair's breadth, whose dominant power has compelled the earth to follow a set orbit of revolution: whose mighty kingdom has a complete command over air, water and light; whose immense power provided the necessary resources before the birth of man which made its survival possible; whose overbearing power of this authority is such that with a little imbalance in the resources of life, it can bring about the destruction of our entire human race. Living under this system such an independence cannot be imagined which allows man to mould his destiny as he wishes. It is highly improper to think that the power which has brought us into this world, who has given us knowledge, thinking capacity and endowed us with powers of determination and decision-making, who has given

us the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, to draw distinction between ethical and unethical behaviour and the capacity to adopt one course of action and shun the other in our worldly affairs, has done all this by way of fun. We come across a great deal of seriousness in the planning and governance of this universe. Nowhere do we come across any fun and frolic in this universe. Hence, the reality is the same which every person feels by way of intuition, i.e. we have been given certain powers on a limited scale. In the exercise of these powers, we have been kept independent to a reasonable extent. This independence has been granted and not earned. What is the quantum of this independence and what are its limitations and nature? The determination of this is difficult or rather impossible, but we cannot deny its existence. In the scheme of this vast universe this is the position we have been allotted that we perform the part of an independent actor on a limited scale. We have been given as much independence as the scheme has provision for. Morally we are as much responsible as we are independent. Both these factors as to how far we are independent and to what extent we are responsible for our acts, is beyond human knowledge. Only that power who

has designated this position to us in his scheme, has the definite knowledge.

This is the theory which religion has adopted on this issue. On the one hand religion invites us to have faith in the all-powerful, omnipotent god which implies that we and everything around us are subservient to him and his authority has a sweeping effect on everything. On the other hand it gives us the concept of morality and distinction between good and evil and points out that if we follows one path we will attain salvation and if follow the other path we will be punished. This contention can be reasonable only when, exercising our power, we are free to choose the path of our life.

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